

- ☑ Monday's thunderstorm started 10 miles high (back)
- ☑ Psyops helped win Iraqi Freedom (back)
- ☑ Clark Gable joined the Army Air Force in 1942 after his wife, Carole Lombard, was killed in a plane crash on a war bond tour. He left a \$30,000 a month acting career to fly combat missions with the Eighth Air Force.

Hospital ship Comfort mended bodies torn by war

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

Two Westover medical officers saw what bullets do to the flesh and bone of soldiers and what fear and pain does to the eyes of children. Maj. Michael Stankus and Capt. John Galvany served aboard the USNS Comfort, a hospital ship where care and compassion do everything possible to alleviate the awful aftermath of war on bodies and souls.

The 439th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron members served for eight weeks, including the ground war, aboard the 1,000-bed hospital ship in the Persian Gulf. They know the toll of blood and pain on the road to Baghdad beyond the television's detached and sanitized version.

"The reality of war hit me when they brought the first dead Marine on board in a body bag," said Stankus, an aeromedical evacuation flight nurse.

Designed as a super tanker, three football fields long, the Navy's Comfort was the biggest hospital in the Middle East, with eight decks and 12 operating rooms. During the drive to Baghdad, the Comfort's intensive care units were filled with patients arriving by helicopter.

Medical professionals, chaplains and

two psychiatrists aboard ship cared for American troops, Iraqi civilians and EPWs evacuated from Iraq battle fields. The two Westover officers served on a joint service Air Evacuation Liaison Team, moving patients to Germany or the United States.

Iraqi Freedom aboard the Comfort was a tableau of the courage and cruelty of war. Soldiers and Marines with shrapnel wounds pleaded to rejoin to their friends at the front. A 19-year-old Marine with a shattered cranium and destroyed eye sat in bed with the flat, wooden expression of a teenager not yet able to comprehend the magnitude of his loss.

Combat wounds were never clean. Flying metal breaks bones, destroys muscle tissue, pushes debris and torn clothing into flesh. Medics constantly struggled with massive infections caused by a bacteria unique to the Middle East.

Stankus said you have to set aside

emotion. "If you didn't you'd be really torn up. You wouldn't be of any help. You have a job. You want the guy to get back to the States," he said.

He has the experience of working in a Worcester operating, but for the young corpsmen seeing it for the first it was very hard, Stankus said.

"I was on the flight deck when they took patients on board. That's the thing that really hits you, when you encounter casualties right there... poor people burned,

shot. It hits home...not distanced the way it is on TV. Then you see it in the person, looking at peoples' faces," Stankus said.

Galvany, a medical service corps officer, is a New Jersey high school certified athletic trainer and father of two. He was affected by seeing "children with amputations, children in comas, burns, fractures, all different kinds of fractures, some with families, some with no families." Some crew members were so moved they wanted to adopt orphans.

He was told that Saddam fanatics, dubbed Fedayeen, purposely ran through crowds firing at waist level to wound civilians and impose the burden of caring for them on the approaching Americans.

"The kids were tough," Galvany said of the impact on him. "When you have kids of your own it's always tough seeing kids in dire straits. For the personnel on the ship that was the most difficult part," he said.

"I know it happens in every war, but that doesn't make it any easier to accept," said Galvany, who served in the AOR during Desert Storm.

The Comfort chaplains and psychiatrists talked to both patients and crew members who were struggling to cope with "survivor's guilt." An extra effort was made to help a injured Marine Huey pilot, the only survivor of a refueling mishap. By pulling every string,



IN THE GULF -- Capt. John Galvany (left) and Maj. Mike Stankus take a break aboard the USNS Comfort in the Persian Gulf.

And the beat goes on



The tempo of Iraqi Freedom hasn't diminished on the flight line where Patriot Wing and Texas maintainers are going all out to keep planes up to standard after the strain of air bridge operation since February. The only difference is that the numbing cold has given way to sweltering 90 degrees heat that bounces off the tarmac. Here a maintainer gets a generator in place when it was already getting hot yesterday morning. --photo by MSgt. W.C. Pope

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439th AW MISSION: Actively support national objectives on a global scale with ready, mobility forces

Comfort..(From page 1)

the medics got him a visit back to his unit for three hours to say goodbye to his people for his own emotional good.

"How many people are exposed to real in-your-face grunt warfare? It's very personal warfare," Galvany said.

"Surgery can fix shrapnel wounds, there is rehab to learn to walk again, but emotional scars can last for a lifetime. We've made great progress in understanding that since Vietnam," he said.

A burden of a different sort faced by the medics was helping the Iraqi prisoners. "Some of them were just people in the wrong place. But among them were really bad people," Galvany said.

The two medical officers had the satisfaction of being part of a floating hospital that delivered the care and compassion to save the lives of casualties who would have been lost in earlier wars. When he came home, Galvany reflected on the aftermath of Iraqi Freedom from the viewpoint of the medics. "They lived a lifetime worth of experiences in a couple of week.... They paid a different price, you try to heal and yet can't always. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't."

Monday's thunderstorm started 10 miles high

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

Hot air rising 10 miles above Westover bumped into an unusually cold atmosphere to hammer the base with a blast of rain, half-inch hail, lighting and high winds that knocked down two trees and damaged others last Monday.

Curt Osgood, Westover chief of Meteorological Services, said the severe thunderstorm dropped 1.1 inches of rain in about 35 minutes, starting about 5:45 p.m. Wind gusts hit 50 mph.

A unique feature of the storm was its narrow band of about only three miles. Holyoke, four miles to the west, received only about a half inch of rain and little wind.

Psyops helped win Iraqi Freedom

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

A group of soldiers who recently returned home through the Westover Passenger Terminal are witnesses to the repression of the regime of Saddam Hussein.

The soldiers of the 9th Psychological Operations Battalion from Fort Bragg, N.C. worked closely and lived among the Shiites who, like the Kurds, had been particular targets of Hussein. One soldier described how a Shiite man asked for a pass to visit his sister 40 miles away. He couldn't believe that he was free to travel that far away.

For 10 years the man had not seen his sister because travel without special permission would arouse suspicion and risk arrest by the authorities always on the lookout for rebellion. To convince him he was free, the Army soldiers drove him in a Humvee to see his sister.

The psychological operations soldier also described how Hussein had drained marsh lands of southern Iraq, driving people off the land in which they had developed a unique culture over centuries. He spoke of

getting medical care for children who had never seen a doctor even though they lived in a country that is rich in oil. The leaders drove Mercedes and BMWs while others just survived. At the same time, every bare wall had an outsized poster of Saddam and every town square had a statue, he said.

Another soldier described the job of psychological operations as not so much esoteric as just common sense face-to-face working with people. He gave the example of rumors among Iraqi people that wrap-around sunglasses popular among soldiers could see through clothes. He made a point of showing children his sunglasses. "Kids would be stand-offish until you took the sunglasses off. Then they were just like kids from any U.S. town," he said.

The psyops teams included graphics illustrators, intelligence specialists and interpreters, including a young soldier who had learned Arabic in a six-month course.

A tribute to the effectiveness of psyops operations during Iraqi Freedom is that large numbers of Iraqi forces melted away, leaving behind their arms and uniforms. "We are out to provide the truth... provide information to sway beliefs... to leave their positions because the regime is failing and it is futile to stay," a soldier said.

One psyops unit shook the morale of an entrenched Iraqi unit by broadcasting tank noises through loudspeakers. "Psyops isn't just a combat multiplier, it is also a combat reducer," the psychological operations specialist said.

"It's a very, very tight line you walk. It takes a lot of in-depth analysis. You can't walk off the street and broadcast. You need to know the culture, the dialect, the religion," he said.

Pat Stats

Served since Feb. 2, 2003

8,081 passengers -- 2,665 aircraft
30,611,412 pounds of cargo
Info from MSgt. Jim Garrity, 42APS

PATRIOT express

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Security guidelines prohibit using deploying reservist's last names)

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Express-ions

